EPS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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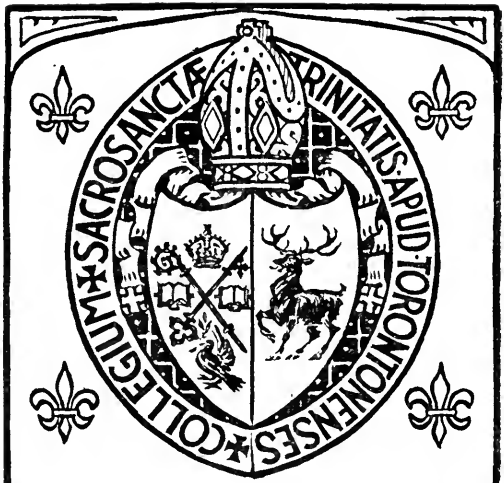


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# STEPS

IN THE

# CHRISTIAN LIFE.

BY

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THE following brief addresses, designed to suggest subjects for meditation, were originally addressed to the members of the Cambridge University Church Society, in the October Term, 1875, and afterwards printed for their use. They are now published at the request of friends who think that they may be of service to others, but I have not thought it well to remove all traces of their original destination. The special applications of the apostolic lessons in one or two places will naturally call out corresponding thoughts where they are not themselves directly applicable.

B. F. W.

CAMBRIDGE,
SS. Philip and James, 1880.

Τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλματα δεδώρηται, ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως, ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς· καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο δὲ σπουδὴν πᾶσαν παρεισενέγκαντες ἐπιχορηγήσατε ἐν τῇ πίστει ὑμῶν τὴν ἀρετήν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀρετῇ τὴν γνῶσιν, ἐν δὲ τῇ γνώσει τὴν ἐγκράτειαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἐγκρατείᾳ τὴν ὑπομονήν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὑπομονῇ τὴν εὐσέβειαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ εὐσεβείᾳ τὴν φιλαδελφίαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ φιλαδελφίᾳ τὴν ἀγάπην· ταῦτα γὰρ ὑμῖν ὑπάρχοντα καὶ πλεονάζοντα οὐκ ἀργοὺς οὐδὲ ἀκάρπους καθίστησιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπίγνωσιν.

2 Peter i. 4–8.

*GOD hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world through lust; yea, and for this very cause, adding on your part all diligence, in your faith provide virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge self-control; and in your self-control patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love. For these things being yours and abounding unto you make you not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2 Peter i. 4–8.

# STEPS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

## I.

*Σπουδὴν πᾶσαν παρεισενέγκαντες.*

BRINGING ALL DILIGENCE.

It is my purpose to consider in succession the characteristics of the Christian life which St. Peter sets before us in the beginning of his Second Epistle (2 Peter i. 5–7). Before doing this however, I wish to notice the view which he gives of the general position of those whom he addresses. That position in all its fulness of blessing, in all its weight of responsibility, is our own. The privileges are ours, the duties are ours. As we realise both more truly we shall come to feel better what we can do, and what we are bound to attempt.

St. Peter, then, assumes the existence of faith in his disciples. They had welcomed the Gospel as true—they had confessed Christ to be Lord —they had received the promises—they had recognised the scope of their calling. The will and the work of God in their behalf were open before their eyes. "Doubt not therefore," he seems to say, "that God will most surely perform His part, that He will strengthen and enlighten and purify you according to your needs, in order that you too may perform your part; look to Him, and to Him only, for every good thing: measure your power by His love: all things are possible for you. All things are possible, but they are not done. All things are possible, but you must realise them. Nothing is now beyond your reach, and so you must labour with more strenuous zeal. Nothing comes *from* you and all depends *upon* you. For this very cause, seeing, that is, that the treasury of heaven

is opened to you, *bring on your part all diligence*, to secure step by step, the perfect growth of the spiritual life. You are Christ's and therefore you can be Christians. Claim your inheritance by unceasing effort. Take possession of that which you have a right to use. Make each success the opportunity for a fresh advance. The end which is set before us, the end therefore which we can reach, is to become *partakers of the divine nature*. That you may reach this consummation, *bring on your part all diligence*."

"*Bring all diligence*." We must do so to make the gifts of God our own. We do not in this way create or earn the blessing, but we appropriate it. So much is within our power; and the thought of this diligence, this zeal, this earnestness, suggests among other lessons these three. The Christian must have a definite aim before him. His diligence will not be inspired by

a passing impulse (1). The Christian will pause from time to time to see clearly where he is and whither he is moving. His diligence will be guided by knowledge (2). The Christian will remember that grace is given to him not to avoid but to overcome difficulties. His diligence will be undaunted by failure, and bold, even in discomfiture, to strive towards the highest (3).

1. *Bring all diligence.* Must we not confess each to ourselves that we are apt to live at random? We are swayed by the circumstances which we ought to control. We find it a relief when we are spared (as we think) the necessity for reflection or decision: a book lightly taken up, a friend's visit, a fixed engagement, fill up the day with fragments; and day follows day as a mere addition. There is no living idea to unite and harmonize the whole. Of course we cannot make, or to any great extent modify,

the conditions under which we have to act; but we can consciously render them tributary to one high purpose. We can regard them habitually in the light of our supreme end. This is, as it seems to me, the first result of zeal; and it is in spiritual matters as elsewhere, that great results are most surely gained by the accumulation of small things. If we strive continuously towards a certain goal, the whole movement of our life however slow will be towards it; and as we move, the gathered force will make our progress more steady and more sure.

2. *Bring all diligence.* If it is our desire to keep before our eyes the Christian aim of life and to strain towards it in fulfilment of every common duty, we shall feel the necessity of self-inquiry. Such an examination as is required every one can make. A keen, swift glance turned inwards will shew us what we have gained and lost from day to day and week

to week. A few moments of quiet, a clear question asked in the silence of the soul, a witness plainly rendered: this will be enough to enable us to judge ourselves, and stir us to act upon the judgment. If in the retrospect we see that our true aim has been hidden by self-will, the power of amendment is within our reach. If we find that by God's help we have come nearer to it, we can offer again to Him the life which is fitted to be a worthier sacrifice.

3. *Bring all diligence.* Each review of the past will make plainer the necessity of exertion. The peace of the Christian is not in the absence of conflict but in the assurance of the issue. Doubts and misgivings, a sense of loneliness and a weight of despondency will come. The imitation of Christ is the imitation of Him who in the eyes of the world failed fatally. But that apparent failure has revealed a new way

of triumph. Suffering in whatever form it may reach us is the discipline of perfection. What is pledged to us is not immunity from trials, but power to overcome them, power I would say to transmute them by a spiritual alchemy. The Kingdom of God is taken by violence. "It is not attained by slothfulness," (to quote Archbishop Leighton,) "and sitting still with folded hands; it must be invaded with the strength of faith, with armies of prayers and tears." And the secret of strength is to know that what we have is not our own or for ourselves: that it is God who worketh in us: that the will to do our duty is the sign of His Presence, and the accomplishment of it in each detail, the earnest of His love.

*Bring all diligence.* Aim, reflection, effort; these three lie at the foundation of the human side of the Christian life. No doubt they present life to us under a very serious aspect. But

the solemnity of life is a fact quite apart from the Christian interpretation of it. Our faith illuminates mysteries which it finds, and does not either create or deepen; and the thoughts which I have endeavoured to suggest, together with the practical consequences which flow from them, correspond with what we must all find to be the inevitable conditions of our human existence. They help us to understand little by little the difficulty, the vastness, the nobility of our calling. They help us to understand what we may expect as *fellow-workers with the truth, fellow-workers of God.* They help us to understand how we may bring down to our work on earth the power of the world to come. They help us to understand how every life can be made one, inspired by a divine purpose, and purified by a divine light.

## II.

### Ἐπιχορηγήσατε ἐν τῇ πίστει ὑμῶν τὴν ἀρετήν.

### IN YOUR FAITH SUPPLY VIRTUE.

We have seen that St. Peter assumes the existence of faith in those whom he addresses. He urges them to realise what God has done for them: to work out step by step (because they can now work it out) the perfection of the spiritual life. "*Bringing on your part*" he says, "*all diligence in your faith, supply virtue*"—"*in your faith supply virtue*," we must observe, and not merely "to faith add virtue." The believer moves, as it were, in the sphere of faith, and so is able to supply "virtue" as the first element in the Christian character. Faith as quickened by "the Faith" makes all else possible. What then must we understand by "virtue?" It is

perhaps surprising that the original word occurs only in three other places in the New Testament, of which one only (Phil. iv. 8), is in any way similar to this. Both there and here "virtue" appears to mark something universally recognised as good: something which carries the instinctive approbation of conscience. As it stands here it may be rightly taken to describe generally the excellence of man as man. Heathen philosophers had drawn a noble ideal of what man ought to be. The Gospel—the Truth—furnished the power by which the ideal could be wrought out by all. The first stage in the spiritual life is the fulfilment of the natural type of virtue.

If we take this general sense of the word and endeavour to bring it home to ourselves, we shall find it useful to consider the term under different aspects. Thus there is the excellence —the virtue—which is characteristic of the

race (1), and of a man (2), and of each man individually (3). St. Peter, I believe, charges his disciples to realise in due measure these three. He bids them present to the eyes of the world the clear spectacle of men devoted to things true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely. He bids them seek to make body soul and spirit a fit sacrifice to God. He bids them use every personal endowment, even the least, as part of a divine trust. The same obligation rests upon us as upon the first believers, and to us also power is given to fulfil it.

1. The charge has often been brought against religion that it tends to make men narrow-minded, censorious, hard, affected. I do not stop to enquire whether Christians do in fact offend more grievously in these respects than other men, as the offence is in their case certainly more grievous. It is enough that our own failures, as we shall all allow, too often give

colour to the charge. We are undoubtedly tempted to keep our eyes fixed on some isolated portion of the truth, to judge others by ourselves, to overrate customary forms, to repeat traditional phrases; and all this, as often as we are overcome by the temptation, conveys a wrong impression of what the Faith is. For if we are narrow and hard, it is in spite of, and not in consequence of our Faith. And St. Peter by choosing "virtue" as the first trait of Christian character, warns us against such faults. Religion is stamped first with the mark of manliness in its highest sense. Whatever is false, or mean, or cowardly, or ungenerous is utterly at variance with it. And on the other hand there is nothing true, or lofty, or heroic which does not find its proper place—and more than that, its unfailing support—in the life of faith. We can appeal to every deed of devotion and self-sacrifice, as a fragmentary "testimony of the

soul naturally Christian." And as we do so we shall be stirred ourselves to nobler efforts. Our faith must be a vital principle and not a dress. Here then we have occasion to examine ourselves; and at the present time the need of doing so seems to be most urgent. It rests with us, to shew each in our little way that all that moves the instinctive admiration of men flows of necessity from our Creed. In our faith we must supply virtue.

2. Our Faith has, we repeat, among its natural fruits those qualities which mankind are constituted to approve. It extends also to the fulness of life. The virtue which the Christian has to supply reaches over the whole range of human activity, in thought and act and feeling. The virtue of the cloister, or of the school, or of the closet is not all. There is the virtue also of the market and of the council chamber. And this too is a growth of faith.

In times of great confusion it has often happened that there has been a sharp division between the religious life and the secular life to the grevious injury of both. Many symptoms both at home and abroad point to the danger of such a separation coming again. Against this catastrophe we are called upon to labour. Its final source is simply want of faith; and by God's help it can be averted if we carry out into practice the conviction of our hearts, that we can do all things as Christians. It is then of the deepest moment that we should keep our sympathies wide and keen; that we should guard against indifference towards any object of human interest. Every fragment of life belongs to us. Every social movement, every political change, affects in some way the advent of that Kingdom of God for which we pray. We neglect our duty, we fail to supply that virtue which is required of us, if we deliberately stand aloof

from any pursuit, from any conflict, in which we are fitted to engage.

3. For while the "virtue" of which St. Peter speaks embraces all that is rightly held to be great and good in popular judgment, while it enters every field of human interest, it is for each one of us just that excellence which answers to our particular power. As Christians we are bound to claim for our faith the fulfilment of the highest moral ideal towards which men strive: as Christians we are bound to sympathise with their manifold efforts in each part of their nature: but as Christians we are bound to be, so far as we can, exactly what God has fitted us to be. We have all, I suppose, been tempted to think that we might serve God better under some other conditions than those in which we are placed: that some other task in which we might take part is more important than that which we find ready to hand. But we are

poor judges of great and small. The little service which we can render may be all that is required to complete the circle of some greater work. That which is poorest in appearance may be most necessary. At least our duty is plain: not to pretend to be what we are not: not to leave our place at will in search of another: not to measure ourselves by others: but to offer to God just what we have and what we are, and so *in our faith supply virtue.*

## III.

### Ἐν τῇ ἀρετῇ τὴν γνῶσιν.

### IN VIRTUE, KNOWLEDGE.

"*In faith supply virtue: in virtue, knowledge.*" In whatever position we may be placed, whatever powers, whatever heritage we may be endowed with, it is our duty, as we have seen, to strive by the inspiration and in the strength of our faith towards that excellence—that virtue—which corresponds to the true constitution of humanity, to the whole nature of man, to the peculiar characteristics of our individual being. We are bound to aim at each moment at the most complete fulfilment of our several offices in the great life of the Church and of the world. That we may do so, that we may continue to do so, we must not remain stationary. For virtue answers to Truth; and

for us Truth depends on knowledge, a knowledge which is in its very essence progressive. The knowledge of self, the knowledge of God in Christ, the knowledge of the great order in which we are placed, can never be final. The effort to realise that which we have learnt will drive us forward. "Knowledge for knowledge" is parallel with "grace for grace" in the divine economy. And it is not, I think, without significance that the Greek term for absolute scientific knowledge, finds no place in the New Testament.

*In virtue, knowledge.* As we look back upon the past we shall all see how consciously or unconsciously we have in one sense grown in a knowledge of divine things: how, I mean, the fundamental truths as to self, and the world, and God, have presented themselves to us in new ways, as the years have gone forward: how difficulties which we once felt

have vanished in fuller light: how difficulties which once we did not feel have risen upon our horizon with a solemn impressiveness. Such knowledge may come simply as an inevitable necessity: it may come as a great temptation: it may come as a divine blessing. This last St. Peter bids us make it. "Because your faith renders all things possible for you" he says "because you strive to realise the fulness of your special office, labour to understand better its manifold bearings. Keep open every avenue of understanding. Watch eagerly for each ray of light, freshly kindled, it may be, by strange hands. Live from hour to hour as eager to be learners all the days even to the end."

We all need such an appeal. There is, I fancy, always about us a spiritual indolence which springs from an intellectual indolence. We have seen and felt something of the

Truth; and we are tempted to rest in the first imperfect experience. It is not so however that we can really hold that which we have gained. Life is only another name for progress. In his former epistle St. Peter tells us that the prophets themselves "*sought and searched diligently*" as to the further meaning of the message which they were inspired to deliver. Even for them the striving after knowledge was not made superfluous by a divine illumination; or rather, the greatness of their gifts made the striving more unremitting and intense.

It is true that knowledge in itself is not an end still less the end of life. If it were so, we might well be filled with sadness in regarding the weakness of our faculties, the limits by which our observation is confined, the overpowering magnitude of the mysteries which, as far as we can see, must always

overshadow our earthly existence. But none the less it is impossible not to feel how every access of knowledge gives distinctness and reality to our Faith: how we are enabled to see fresh harmonies in the Bible, as we apprehend with a more simple trust the interpretation of the outward facts of life. And for the Christian the knowledge thus gained—the knowledge of the circumstances of life—the knowledge of the supreme law of life—is only another name for a constraining principle of action. Knowledge passes at once from the region of thought into the region of deed. The Christian works that he may learn, and he learns that he may work.

*In your virtue supply knowledge.* Out of all the practical rules which suggest themselves as helpful for the fulfilment of the charge, I will take three only: avoid controversy: enter with sympathy into the manifoldness of

knowledge, while as yet every influence of age and circumstance makes it easy to do so: keep steadily before your eyes Him in Whom alone all knowledge finds its unity and its promise of fulfilment.

1. Avoid controversy. There must be some whose work it is to meet adversaries in debate. But, as Archbishop Leighton said, "it is a loss to them that they are forced to be busied in that way," and this work is not for the young. It is your privilege to be able to seize the Truth in all its freshness, thrice happy if you can so take it into yourselves, that it may be in you a power able to assimilate the good that lies around concealed under various disguises. It is immeasurably better to spare no pains to understand the truth by which a false system lives, than to gain a victory over it at the price of disregarding this fragmentary good. Nothing can be more perilous than to

use weapons which we have not proved. If we win with them, we shall be tempted to treat the Faith as a question of words, when it is a question of life; and every success so obtained will leave behind it a sense of failure and doubt. There is a terrible, a crushing retribution for him who ventures to maintain a just cause by arguments which he does not feel in the depths of his soul to be sufficient; and few—very few—can put into formal language without long experience the real grounds of their belief. It may often be our duty to keep silence: it can never be our duty to defend our faith in a way which does not bring conviction to ourselves.

2. Enter with sympathy into the manifoldness of knowledge. It is of course impossible for any one to traverse in detail the whole range of thought and research. But every one can gain a true conception of its vastness.

Every one can appreciate in some degree the various methods and ends of inquiry. Every one can learn what to hope for in each direction, and can understand whither he may look for light on the dark questions of personal and social duty. Every one can in this way come to see that all single-hearted efforts towards the truth, all revelations of order and law are, whatever men may think, tributary to his Faith. If from time to time we are obliged to wait and watch as it were afar off the course of some great controversy on a physical problem—to take one example—we can all the while be sure that the issue will bring fresh treasures for our use. And in the calm certainty of this conviction we shall not presume to decide beforehand what the issue must be.

3. Clinging in this way to the positive, vital, elements of faith, regarding every phase

of noble activity as those should do to whom it has been said "*all things are yours,*" you will have always before you Him in whom the Truth becomes perso al. "*All things are yours, and ye are Christ's,*" "*in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*" Yes, my friends, for the Christian knowledge is sacred. As we know anything better in any real sense of the word, we know Christ better. *Ex uno Verbo omnia, et unum loquuntur omnia: "All things proceed from one Word, and all things have one utterance.*" Whatever may be the immediate subject of our study, we can see Him through it. A moment's pause will be enough, and the light of His presence will flash over our work. In this light we can live and die: without this light all knowledge is unsubstantial and unsatisfying. But in the consecration of work, in the clear vision of the end of work, in the vital sense of the strength of

work, we shall have found that which can inspire and guide and sustain us. *In virtue supply knowledge* — a knowledge of Christ, which illuminates the last problems of self and creation, a knowledge of self and creation, which brings Christ close to the soul. *Cui omnia unum sunt*—to go on with the sentence which I began—*et qui omnia ad unum trahit et omnia in uno videt, potet stabili corde esse et in Deo pacificus permanere:* "he for whom all things are one, and who draws all things to One, and sees all things in One, can be stedfast in heart and remain at peace in God."

## IV.

*Ἐν τῇ γνώσει τὴν ἐγκράτειαν.*

IN KNOWLEDGE, SELF-CONTROL.

THE two characteristics of the Christian life which we have already noticed, *virtue* and *knowledge*, may be described generally as energetic and aggressive. They find their scope in fulfilling and extending the powers with which the believer is endowed. The two characteristics which follow, *temperance* (*self-control*) and *patience*, are on the other hand disciplinary and internal. They find their scope in the regulation of a man's own being, in bringing order into the conflicting elements of his own constitution, and in confirming that constancy which is required to meet the assaults to which he is exposed from without.

*In knowledge, temperance.* Just as "*virtue*" forms the sphere in which the acquisition of "*knowledge*" becomes possible and imperative, so the pursuit and the possession of *knowledge* reveals the necessity of *temperance* and brings it within reach. But the word *temperance* falls far short of the original. The original term describes that sovereign self-mastery, that perfect self-control, in which the mysterious will of man holds in harmonious subjection all the passions and faculties of his nature. Where it is complete, no impulse however strong, no endowment however conspicuous finds play, without the sanction of that central ruling power which represents the true self, and then only according to its bidding. In this aspect *temperance, self-control,* is the correlative of freedom, as freedom expresses the absolute fulfilment of individual duty.

The first great enemy of self-control is self-

indulgence. It cannot be necessary for me to speak here of the grosser forms of self-indulgence, of the inevitable and overwhelming slavery which they bring with them. It can scarcely be more necessary to remind those, whose experience must speak only too plainly, of the danger of the less noticeable faults of self-indulgence which mar the power of our lives: how little by little they weaken and distract and preoccupy us: how a trifling duty once put off or carelessly fulfilled leaves us more exposed to the next serious temptation: how idle fancies pursued, vain thoughts dallied with, come back to us with importunate force, when we would gladly make any sacrifice to be free from their intrusion: how we grow unable to commune silently and seriously with our own souls, because we have shrunk from the discipline of solitude when it was offered for our acceptance.

Not a day can pass which does not give point to these commonplace truths: which does not perhaps move us to some fresh resolves for greater watchfulness. By these resolves we are able to allay for the time the pain of past failures. They have a helpful and they have a perilous aspect. Happily we can yet take to heart the lessons which they embody: we can, God helping us, fence ourselves about by adequate safeguards, which actual experience has suggested; but we dare not forget as we look forward that the task if neglected becomes more difficult from hour to hour, and that each resolution broken is forthwith a coign of vantage to the tempter.

But self-indulgence is not the only enemy of self-control. Self-will is a more subtle and so far a more formidable enemy. Self-will is to mind what self-indulgence is to sense, the usurpation by a part of that

which belongs to the whole. We have, or we think that we have, some popular aptitude: and we yield ourselves without reflection to the desire to vindicate our superiority. Or we are moved unadvisedly to express a judgment, and "proudly cling to our first fault." Or in the very wantonness of fancied security, we play with that for which we do not really care. In one way or other our self-love becomes engaged in the course which we have hastily adopted. There is no longer any room for the calm fulfilment of our whole work. We have yielded ourselves to a tyranny, which cannot be broken more easily than the tyranny of passion.

This intemperance of self-will needs to be guarded against the more carefully because it is not visited by the same popular condemnation as the intemperance of self-indulgence, and yet it is no less fatally destructive of the Christian life. We can all, I fancy, recall noble

natures which have been ruined by its evil power, and looking within ourselves we can feel the reality of the peril which it brings.

*In knowledge, temperance.* The Apostle counsels temperance, you will observe, the just and proportionate use of every faculty and gift, and not the abolition or abandonment of any. It is easier in many cases to pluck out the right eye or to cut off the right hand than to discipline and employ them. Sometimes also it may be a clear duty to cast wholly away what we are no longer able to consecrate. But this is to accept by a sad necessity the less noble course, and to render a maimed offering to God, though it is the best in our power seeing what we have become. St. Peter therefore calls us to the fulfilment of a loftier ideal. He bids us, while there is yet time and opportunity, strive to bring every fragment of our nature, every power by which we are carried towards the

good, and the beautiful, and the true, under the sovereign sway of the Christian conscience, and to render their manifold fruits as the rational service of our whole being.

*In knowledge, temperance.* If there is one element of the Christian character which answers to the conditions of your life here, it is, I think, this temperance, this self-control, of which we have been speaking. You feel as you have not felt before—I think I may say as you will never feel again—the energy of freedom; you feel the stimulating impulses of opening powers; you feel the attractive grandeur of the many problems of the world; you feel the stirring joy of deep emotions; and to all these movements, desires, aspirations, passions, you have at this crisis to bring order and unity: you have to make all subserve to the master purpose of your life; you have to reduce all into subjection to a serene and stable will; you have to look on all

in the light of your Faith and so prepare yourselves to fulfil your part in Christ's Kingdom.

For those who have the priceless privilege of University training it is not too much to say that the character and efficiency of future work is in nearly all cases finally determined by the few short years spent under its influence. You can, by God's help, I had almost said you can most easily and naturally, gain here that temperance, that self-control, which will hereafter make your action effective by its harmonious concentration and winning by its sympathetic considerateness. That you may be enabled to do so, what more can be necessary than that you pause from time to time to regard the boundless power of the Truth, to take account of failures and successes, of temptations overcome and temptations growing more powerful, to look forward to the end—the end of life and the end of your life?

"The prize is noble and the hope is great." So Plato spoke. The words gain a practical force by the teaching of St. Paul: *Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, we an incorruptible.*

## V.

### Ἐν τῇ ἐγκρατείᾳ τὴν ὑπομονήν.

### IN SELF-CONTROL, PATIENCE.

THE work of self-control, self-mastery, does not exhaust the claims of Christian discipline. We have more to meet than the powers which assault and trouble us from within. These we can to a certain extent regulate, harmonize, bring into subjection to the main purpose of our lives. But there are other forces and influences powerful to mould the character, which we cannot hope individually to modify to any appreciable degree. Thus we have to take account of the general tendency of opinion, of the actual accumulation of knowledge, of the laws of social movement, which determine for the most part

the character of the medium in which we have to act. *In* our *self-control*, therefore, we must supply *patience*. There is something to be borne with resolute endurance as well as something to be conquered by energetic effort. But patience — that calm strength which sustains courageously the burden which cannot rightly be thrown off, which waits in sure confidence, as knowing that the darkness cannot last for ever —has its own victories. *In your patience*, the Lord said to His disciples in the prospect of unparalleled trials, *ye shall win your souls*.

This lesson of patience is one, I think, which we greatly need to lay to heart at the present time. Many obvious causes combine to make men restless under the pressure of uncertainty, to tempt them on the one side to take refuge in some system which may free them from the responsibility of judgment, and on the other to renounce enquiries which seem to admit of no

decisive issue. We have all, I fancy, known in our own experience, the perils of the impatience which calls out dogmatism, and of the impatience which calls out scepticism. Both forms of impatience array themselves under specious disguises and assume fair names. The one claims to be devout humility, and the other to be absolute love of truth. But Christian patience is more rightly humble than the one, and more sincerely truth-loving than the other, being, as it is, the necessary result of a just survey of our position and of our hopes.

For, if our immediate circumstances suggest thoughts of impatience, a wider view of life will banish them. Do what we will we cannot take away the sad stern mysteries of life, the mysteries of birth and death, the one central mystery of our finite personal being. These must remain, however we regard them or refuse to regard them; and they must remain unsolved.

They are not less real because we close our eyes to them. They are not less insoluble because we refuse to discuss them. Christianity does not bring them into the world; and to reject the message of Faith is not to do away with the subjects to which it is directed. It is impossible to reduce human life to elements which will furnish certain conclusions. Even that certain knowledge which we can gain by isolating in abstraction particular properties of things, becomes delusive unless we place it in connexion, consciously and assiduously, with that immeasurably larger range of topics of which we are either actually or necessarily ignorant. Reason then, no less than faith, forces upon us the duty of patience in the face of the problems of existence.

But though we cannot, from the nature of the case, ever remove the mysteries of life, yet as time goes on, and the purposes of God grow clearer with the lapse of ages, we are enabled to

see them under new lights, to group them together, to feel, as it were, the end to which they are pointing. In this aspect therefore we really impoverish ourselves if we thrust back unreflectingly, by an effort of will, each difficulty which presents itself to us. We are not indeed to dally with it, or to pride ourselves upon seeing it, or to exaggerate its importance; but our duty and our hope is to regard it with patience, to place it in its true position as something which requires and may in due time receive more light. To claim completeness for our opinions is to abandon the encouragement of progress; and on the other hand difficulties frankly met reveal new paths of truth. They stimulate us to strive for fuller knowledge, and they prepare us for gaining it. The patience which regards with clear and untroubled vision *all* the parts of our being, so far as they are visible, which sets the weakness of man side by side with what is

made known in the long ages of the loving power of God, which learns neither to haste nor to rest in a pursuit for the good which lingers, disciplines and quickens our faculty of spiritual discernment. The same attitude of patience which becomes such beings as we are, secures for us also the most favourable conditions for converting our trial into a blessing.

I do not wish to maintain that the burden of patience is not grievous, that patience is not in a true sense suffering, but I do say that the temper which it is calculated to form is best fitted for the apprehension of the widest truths which are within our reach. It is not, we can see, the Divine method to answer at once every sincere questioner, or to guide every one to the good on which his soul is fixed. God has—so His servants have found—some better thing in store for those who seek Him with complete self-surrender than they have yet imagined, in answer to deeper

questionings than they have yet framed, an aim for them to reach loftier than that which they have seen. It is not always good for us to be spared the stern discipline of failure, the desolate silence of doubts unsatisfied, the weariness of delays and the dull pressure of loneliness. It is through these that patience has her perfect work, and finds that the sense of unrest is a promise of progress.

Let us not then, my friends, think it strange that we have to bear as Christians the trial which must press on men. Let us not refuse the chastening by which as sons we are taught still to look forward to the full enjoyment of our inheritance. Let us not fear to confess with the confidence of loyal trust in God that we know only in part. Let us not yield to the seduction of some dogmatic definition which often on the side of the intellect usurps the place of a personal, vital, progressive appropriation of the corre-

sponding truth. So the horizon of our vision will be widened as the years go on. We shall bring into more effective use from day to day the powers of the heavenly order. We shall find every burden fall off at last in the sight of the Cross and the Sepulchre. *In our patience we shall win our souls.*

## VI.

### Ἐν τῇ ὑπομονῇ τὴν εὐσέβειαν.

### IN PATIENCE, GODLINESS.

*In patience, godliness.* This clause marks the transition in the Apostle's description to the view of what may be called the social spirit of the Christian character. He has set before us the believer in the energy of his progress, fulfilling at each moment his peculiar office by *virtue*, and gaining a deeper knowledge of himself and of his work, of the world and of God, by *knowledge:* he has also shewn us how he uses the discipline which is forced upon him both by the circumstances of his own constitution and by the circumstances of his outward life, how he rules himself with true self-control by *temperance*, and supports the long trials of

ignorance and delay by *patience.* He now is going to mark the manner in which he regards others, with *brotherly kindness* and *love;* but before doing this he notices that still larger virtue—*godliness*—which gives solidity and permanence to the noblest feelings which natural affection and sympathy suggest in regard to the world about us. For the term rendered *godliness* is far more than "*godliness*" in our common acceptation of the word. It is that spirit of devout reverence which springs out of the recognition of God's immediate Presence, or, to present part of the truth from the opposite side, that spirit of devout reverence which springs out of a sense of the true divinity of things as created by God and sustained by God; and it is by dwelling on these facts of the nearness of God, of the revelation of Him made through His works, of the indestructible, if dimmed, glory which bears witness to the origin of man and nature, that

we can gain such a humble and tender regard for both as may enable us even in the sight of their actual "bondage to corruption" to bear ourselves before them as in the presence of that which God made and blessed.

In this sense "godliness," the living piety which sees and hears God at all times and in all places is one of the truest fruits and one of the greatest supports of Christian Faith. Our Faith gives vitality to the feeling, and the feeling brings our Faith closer home to us.

Such godly reverence acts in many ways and in many spheres. Not to speak of that vast, dim, solemn awe of God Himself, as the object of thought, which underlies thought in all cases, the feeling shews itself in relation to the believer, and to men and to creation. How often, for example, the thought "*ye are not your own, ye were bought with a price*" calls us back to

a right estimate of our personal duty and of our personal destiny. How often light is thrown —however little it may be—upon the dark problems of the world by the recollection of the scope of Christ's death — *not for our sins only but for the whole world*—in which purpose of love there is made known that on which we also can rest in hope. How often when we look out upon the immeasurably vast ranges of phenomena about us, a consciousness of order and hope comes back to us as we ponder the words "*the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now*," so that the suffering which we cannot dissemble is presented to us as the transition to completer life. In all these ways a "godly reverence," a profound yet childlike conviction of the Divine Presence in us and around us, unchanged and untouched in its ineffable holiness and beauty by the sin and evil and sorrow which mar our

perception of it, supports us in our conflict with our own temptations, and enables us to look without despair upon what seems to our eyes wide and inevitable waste and loss.

Since this is so, it cannot but be a great help to us in striving after a better life to deepen this spirit of godly reverence, to "*supply it in our patience*" in ever increasing intensity. It is not difficult to see one simple method by which this end may be attained. A short habitual or deliberate pause before engaging in religious acts, or entering sacred places, or in the midst of some great natural joy, or under the pressure of some disappointment, with the effort to feel God as actually listening to us, or waiting to receive us, or tempering for our use the gifts of His love, will bring to us a lively practical sense of that real atmosphere of the Divine by which we are surrounded, of that spiritual fellowship, which the fact of

the Incarnation, the mystery—the revelation—of godliness, confirms in the form under which we can apprehend it.

Our prayers, perhaps, are distracted, broken, we hardly know how, by wandering thoughts and blank vacancies of thought. In such a case an act of godly reverence in which we set before our minds the present and unspeakable majesty of God, as our Maker and Judge, who cannot but know, remember, try all,—repeated, if need be, by an instantaneous thought as often as the attention flags,—will assist us to realise that conscious communion with the unseen which is the essence of prayer. We must not rest till we feel that we are in the presence of a King. So the experience of the Psalmist will be our own: *I have set God always before me, therefore I shall not fall.*

Or again, temptations come to us in what seem to be little matters. The particular actions

or omissions, as we think, concern ourselves alone: they cannot affect others: their consequences will soon pass away. If we are likely to be deceived by these pleadings, an act of godly reverence will at once scatter the delusion. The test which will try us lies in the realised conviction: *Thou God seest me.* When this is gained I do not doubt that it will at once be followed by the confession and the supplication addressed to One near at hand: *I am thine: O Lord save me.*

Times of gladness are probably more perilous to the spiritual life than times of more sensible temptation. It is proportionately more necessary that we should seek to mark them with the sign of Faith. To take a simple instance: we have all known occasions when we have been possessed, as it were, with the fulness of mere physical pleasure. The flooding sunlight, the immeasurable sky, the sea, or the mountains

have entered into our souls: happy then shall we be if we have consecrated the joy with the strong assurance that all this is but a faint reflection of His glory *in whom we live and move and have our being:* if we have used the opportunity to enter a little more deeply into the mysterious life of creation, to pass gladly "beneath the more habitual sway" of that godly reverence which becomes us in looking at God's works.

In sorrow and loss and failure we turn instinctively to God for the consolation which we have not found and cannot find elsewhere. If we have not learnt before to recognise the signs of His Presence, it may be hard to see Him in our extremity. But if we have looked for Him at other times: if by various experience we have been enabled to pierce beneath the veil: if we have referred our joys to Him: He will not hide Himself from us in our need. The

godly reverence which has hallowed our brighter hours will bring light to us in our darkness: *at evening time, it shall be light.*

*In patience, supply godliness,* godly reverence: so shall we come to see with clearer vision the signs and the claims of God's Presence in ourselves, in our fellow-men, in each creature: so shall we understand better how even now *the glory of the Lord is over all His works:* so shall we be guided to make work and worship one harmonious whole, fulfilled in many ways in the sight and by the power of Him who has made us and redeemed us to be "*a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.*"

## VII.

### Ἐν τῇ εὐσεβείᾳ τὴν φιλαδελφίαν.

### IN GODLINESS, LOVE OF THE BRETHREN.

*In godliness, brotherly kindness.* Godliness is, as we have seen, that vital, practical sense of the abiding Presence of God which enables us to see Him in all things, and conversely to regard all things in Him, as their Creator and Preserver. Such a feeling of godly reverence for man and for nature, which must flow directly from a true perception of the relation of man and nature to God, at once places us in a position to bear ourselves as we ought to do towards our fellow-Christians and our fellow-men, to realise first that quality which is presented in our version as *brotherly kindness*, and then in the strength of that more limited virtue to rise to the crowning virtue of *love*.

For the word rendered "brotherly kindness" is not *brotherly kindness* in the sense of an affection which has a universal application: it is rather *love of the brethren*, a particular feeling of Christians for Christians, in virtue of their peculiar relationship one to another as members of one family, bound together by special ties, partners in a full revelation of the divine Fatherhood. It is then this element of the Christian character—the conduct of the believer towards believer, simply as such, that we have to consider now.

As the command stands, *in godly reverence supply love of the brethren*, there is no question of any outward likeness of position or circumstances or tastes or acquirements or duties. The common brotherhood in the Faith is assumed to lie deeper and to be more powerful than all these. And it is at once evident how the belief in Christ Incarnate, Crucified, Ascended,

must change and intensify our conception of God's Presence, must give a fresh meaning to the spirit of godly reverence, must impress an ineffaceable stamp upon the connexion of those who hold it; must bring them very close together as alike possessed of a Truth and an assurance, compared with which all knowledge and all endowments are inappreciably small. But I do not wish to speak of *the love of the brethren* in this large yet unquestionable scope. I wish rather to speak of it as it affects ourselves, who besides our common Faith have very much in common, in age and employments and hopes and the countless influences of social life, which in themselves all combine to make friendship, with every office of kindliness and fellowship, natural and permanent among us.

And it is, I think, of great importance that we should all look at the obligations of faith in this familiar, social aspect. We lose far more,

I believe, by our religious isolation than we suspect. We not only fail to secure the progress which is possible: we also come unconsciously perhaps to doubt the efficacy of that which we do not use. While on the other hand the Christian love which goes out from us to help a brother cannot but come back charged with a new power. We shall win our own souls as we win others.

"*Love one another*," the Apostle says in another place, "*with a clean heart fervently, having been born again.*" It is the possession of this new life, and the acknowledgment of the new obligations and powers brought with it, which distinguishes *our love of the brethren.* The Christian if he acts outwardly towards his brother, as another does who has not the same hope, ought still to act under the constraint and guidance of a more prevailing and a nobler motive. He ought never to forget, and he

ought to labour earnestly, as he may have opportunity, to enable others never to forget, that the Christian Faith reaches to every detail of duty.

I wish then to insist on this great principle and to commend it to your thoughts. I wish to keep in mind and to ask you to keep in mind, that in our common intercourse we are bound to bear ourselves one towards another as Christians towards Christians, remembering, that is, our brotherhood, in order that we may become habitually disciplined to a more social view of the spiritual life.

There are obvious dangers, it is true, in the endeavour to bring our Faith thus to the front; but they are dangers which are not among the greatest now, and University life is comparatively little exposed to them. Affectation, censoriousness, hardness, unreality, are naturally repulsive to the young; and on the other hand there is, I think, no time when a kindly and

courageous word spoken in Christ's name and for Christ is wider or more enduring in its effects. It may be a school-fellow, or a friend, or a stranger whom we may influence by some simple sentence, or perhaps more often by some silent act which bears witness to the vital energy of our belief. Each one will find opportunities for such a true confession; and if only we had the wisdom and the energy to use them with the patient humility of an undoubting conviction, I am sure that we should marvel at the result. As it is, too commonly a natural reserve becomes chilled into a hard irony under which we are content to dissemble our real feelings and aspirations.

How often, for example, a single word of genuine sympathy will embolden another to cast off the burden which he has borne silently, and set forth his difficulties and doubts, and face them and overcome them.

How often a word of counsel spoken out of our own experience will inspire the wavering will of a companion with strength and purpose, and guide him rightly where the ways of life part.

How often a word of expostulation tempered with that gentleness which the sense of our own failure gives, will call out the true self in a man, and help him to conquer the temptation which was on the point of overpowering him as he stood alone.

Now all these—this sympathy, this counsel, this expostulation—are simple acts of that *love of the brethren*, which we owe one to another because we are united in "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism;*" and such acts are progressive and efficacious in their influence, because they are prompted by the thought of Christ and fulfilled in His strength.

And there is something beyond these—dif-

ferent from them and yet variously coloured by them—the daily intercourse of ordinary duties. Here friend can move friend and each find in the other the tokens and the power of that unselfish spirit which rejoices in all work done for Christ with a perfect fellowship, which teaches the believer to reckon not only the failings of others as his own but their successes also, which sees in the communion of faith—marked by the two words "*in Christ*"—the fulfilment of that supreme work in which it is natural that the personal share of each should be lost to our eyes.

*In godly reverence supply love of the brethren.* Because you know what you have received, and what you hope, because you know that these blessings are not yours only but the ground of your union with all believers, because you know that you cannot even fulfil your little part severally without the co-operation of those

about you, live from day to day, in things great and small, as seeing Him who is invisible in those whom He has taken to Himself as members of His Body.

## VIII.

### Ἐν τῇ φιλαδελφίᾳ τὴν ἀγάπην.

### IN LOVE OF THE BRETHREN, LOVE.

*In love of the brethren, love.* The relations between man and man, and man and God, established in Christ and outwardly realised in the Church, cannot but influence the view which the Christian takes of the world at large. The intercourse of believers one with another as believers, the experience of the inestimable value of the many different elements which go to complete the idea of catholicity, the sense of the power of that common brotherhood, recognised in the faith, which lies deeper than all varieties of circumstance, the practical acknowledgment of ties which transcend our pre-

sent life, all combine to make it possible for us to feel as Christians towards those who are not Christians, far otherwise than we should do without the revelation which we have received. *Love of the brethren* when it has grown energetic will necessarily issue in *love*—love expressed thus absolutely, man's love for man answering to and resting upon God's love for man. In this respect too it is worthy of notice that "love" in the most comprehensive sense is individualised for the Christian. There is no injunction of a general love of men—a vague "philanthropy." He who is not our "brother" is still our "neighbour." The widest love, in other words, is personal, not an undefined sentiment, but the practical recognition of a real claim.

Perhaps the simplest and most effective way of presenting to ourselves this loftiest conception of love is to look upon Christ as the centre

of unity for the world, and so to regard all else in Him. "*I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself.*" "*That was the true light which lighteth every man.*" "*It pleased the Father by Him to reconcile—to gather up in one—all things unto Himself.*" "*Not for our sins only but for the whole world.*" These marvellous words give indeed only one side of the divine counsel; but at least they shew to us that where Christ's love rests we also can rest in patient hope: that even when our heart fails us, He is still present to speak words of encouragement through the least and most forlorn of His creatures. There is no exaggeration, if we view the matter rightly, in the command to "*honour all men.*" Nothing can justify us in thinking lightly of one for whom Christ died.

The love of Christ in its twofold sense is the support of the Christian's love, and growing

conformity to Christ is the fruit of love. "To be made like to God" was the noblest aspiration of heathen moralists; and the spirit of Christ converts the aspiration into a fact. By striving to live in Him we are enabled at the same time to cast away all that is selfish, and to consecrate all that belongs to our true selves. The endeavour to fulfil our own duty is of necessity an endeavour to fulfil our duty—however insignificant the part may seem to be—to all. To this end He, according to His promise, lives in us, in order that every power which we have may be hallowed and used. We live in Him in order that every thing which we do may have a social destination.

Thus it comes to pass in the completed life of love, that Christ's words are fulfilled in their highest application "*He that shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*" That which is limited is made a part of that which is infinite

and so preserved for ever. And though such an ideal of life may seem to be immeasurably above our practice, at least it does not go beyond the Lord's commands. His love is set forward as the model of ours. *Be ye perfect*, He says, *as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* And on the other hand nothing perhaps is more injurious to the influence of Christianity on those without, than our own unreadiness to apply to ourselves in the common calls of business, as the motive and measure of our exertion, the frank confession, "*the love of Christ constraineth us.*"

Such a confession presented habitually to our minds, and pondered over, and applied, must, no doubt, bring out into strong relief the solemn side of our present life. But the confession does not cause this solemnity. Nay, rather it alone can enable us to look steadily without despair at the apparent waste and failure and sorrow

in life regarded on a large scale. There are (not to speak of evil) mysteries in these things which we cannot fathom. It is idle and far worse than idle for us to speculate why the world was not made other than it is. The Christian Faith at least reveals to us a love as great as our need, and calls out in us love to answer love.

This being so we must further notice that in this case love cannot but exert its characteristic prerogative. It will find in him on whom it rests that which is worthy of love. It will interpret by sympathy signs which are invisible to the indifferent. Without dissembling the evil which has overspread the world it will gain and hold the assurance that what is begun shall be consummated, and *God shall be all in all.* In this sense also it is true that *perfect love casteth out fear.*

Love which in this way enlarges our vision

at the same time increases our strength. He who loves another receives while he gives. He becomes stronger by the qualities which move his affection. And it is thus only that we can be fitted to fulfil our separate tasks. If we attempt to stand alone we shall sooner or later make sad experience of our weakness. In so doing we set aside the very law of our faith whereby we are taught to see Christ Himself in every one who bears the nature which He took upon Him in absolute fulness. And as we thus go out in heart towards others we come to know God better. Love indeed in this fullest sense is the one way of obtaining the knowledge of God. *He that loveth not hath not known God.* It must be so. All ignorance and all error comes from that selfishness which is the opposite of love. But in love self is transfigured, and faith has its perfect work. Faith is the foundation and love the highest crown.

All that comes between is a preparation for that which reaches up to heaven and abides there.

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Thus we have seen the sevenfold portraiture of the Christian character completed. Step by step it has been offered for our meditations and our prayers as the natural growth of the one Faith which has been given to us. In *virtue* and *knowledge* we have seen the perfect individuality and the unwearied progressiveness of each believer in action and thought: in *temperance* and *patience* we have seen the completeness of his self-control in disciplining his own powers and supporting the pressure of the circumstances by which he is surrounded. In *godliness*—godly reverence—we have seen that he has gained a vital revelation of the divinity of things, which finds its practical application in that *love*

*of the brethren* which leads him at last to *love*—that love which is for us the practical expression of participation in the divine nature.

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There is, as far as I know, nothing which men have ever felt to be noble which is not included in the picture. There is nothing which is not placed within our reach. Once more let us hear the Apostle's words, and may God write them on our hearts and in our lives:

*GOD hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world through lust; yea, and for this very cause, adding on your part all diligence, in your faith provide virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge self-control;*

*and in your self-control patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love. For these things being yours and abounding unto you make you not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

THE END.

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